

ANNOUNCEMENT OF RESEARCH-SET ASIDE TO SUPPORT RESEARCH IN ATLANTIC SEA SCALLOP FISHERIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Federal Agency Name(s):** National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce
- **Funding Opportunity Title:** Request for Research Proposals supported under a Research Set-Aside Program
- **Announcement Type:** Initial Announcement
- **Funding Opportunity Number:** 2005 Atlantic Sea Scallop Research Set-Aside Program
- **Catalogue of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number:** 11.454, Unallied Management Projects
- **Dates:** Full proposals must be received by 5 p.m., eastern standard time, on March 3, 2005.
- **Funding Opportunity Description:** NMFS announces that for fishing year 2005 (March 1, 2005 - February 28, 2006) the New England Fishery Management Council (Council) has set aside portions of the total allowable catch (TAC) and Days-at-Sea (DAS) allowance in the sea scallop fishery to be used for research endeavors under a research set-aside (RSA) program. No Federal funds are provided for sea scallop research under this notification, but rather the opportunity to fish with the catch sold to generate income. The Federal Government's contribution to the project will be a Letter of Authorization (LOA) that will provide special fishing privileges in response to sea scallop research applications selected to participate in this program. In the past, 2-5 awards have been issued. During the 2004 fishing year, the income generated ranged from \$64,140 to \$200,460, with an average of \$131,990. NMFS is soliciting proposals for research activities concerning the Atlantic sea scallop fishery. NMFS and the Council will give priority to funding research proposals in the following areas: (1) groundfish bycatch reduction; (2) reduction of fishing impact on habitat; (3) sea turtle interactions; (4) sea scallop abundance estimates; (5) distribution, size composition, and density of scallops; and (6) other research relevant to the sea scallop fishery as further discussed in the full funding opportunity announcement.

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

The Research Set-aside (RSA) Program provides a mechanism to fund research and compensate vessels through the sale of fish harvested under a research quota. NOAA, in cooperation with the New England Fishery Management Council (Council), is soliciting proposals for sea scallop research to be conducted under RSA programs for fishing year 2005 (March 1, 2005-February 28, 2006). Such research would utilize four RSAs implemented by Amendment 10 to the Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery Management Plan (FMP) (Amendment 10) (69 FR 35194, June 23, 2004), Framework 16 to the Atlantic Sea Scallop FMP and Framework 39 to the Northeast Multispecies FMP (Joint Framework) (69 FR 63460, November 2, 2004) for Fishing Year 2005: (1) a DAS set-aside for use in areas open to all fishery participants, (2) a TAC set-aside for use in the Hudson Canyon Access Area, (3) a TAC set-aside for use in the Closed Area I Access Area and (4) a TAC set-aside for use in the Closed Area II Access Area.

Under the area access program implemented by Amendment 10, limited access sea scallop vessels may be allowed to land scallops in excess of the proposed possession limit, or to take additional trips above those proposed in the program, and use the proceeds of the excess catch or additional trips to offset the costs of the research proposals submitted in response to this notice. The Sea Scallop Access Areas (Access Areas) will remain open until one of four events triggered a closure: (a) The fishing year ends (February 28, 2006); (b) finfish catches exceed TACs established by the Joint Framework; (c) the vessels use all of the trips authorized under the area access program; or (d), the fishing season, as established by the Joint Framework, ends.

In addition, Amendment 10 implemented a DAS RSA that applies to all areas where scallop fishing occurs, including regular open fishing areas. Two percent of the total allowable DAS allocations are set-aside for scallop related research activities, before determining annual fishing allocations for limited access scallop vessels. This pool of DAS is available for authorized research projects, under which vessels may participate in scallop research programs and/or conduct trips to compensate for research expenses incurred. The vessel may be authorized to conduct additional trips of a specified duration that will not be counted against the vessel's annual DAS allocation as compensation.

Vessels participating in an approved project, and fishing in the Sea Scallop Access Areas, may be authorized by the Regional Administrator to do one or more of the following: Take additional trips into the area(s) and/or to land scallops in excess of the possession limits established by the Joint Framework. The possession limits established by the Joint Framework are dependent on permit category and are shown in the chart below.

Fishing Year	Access Area	Possession Limit		
		Full-time	Part-time	Occasional
2005	Closed Area I	18,000 lb (8,165 kg)	16,800 lb (7,620 kg)	7,500 lb (3,402 kg)
	Closed Area II			
	Hudson Canyon			

In order to set a value on the RSAs, the value of scallops must be estimated. This Request for Proposals (RFP) uses an estimated price per pound of \$4.72 based on the average price per pound for calendar year 2004 (through November 15) calculated from dealer reports. By requiring researchers to use this price in requesting TAC and DAS, all proposals will relate scallop catch to research costs similarly. In addition, catch rates are assumed to be 1,847 lb (838 kg) per DAS, based on the Joint Framework analysis of catch rates with access to multispecies Closed Areas.

Research proposals are, therefore, sought to utilize the four set-asides implemented by Amendment 10 and the Joint Framework for Fishing Year 2005: (1) the DAS set-aside for the open fishing areas of 223 DAS with an average catch rate of 1,847 lb/DAS. Given the estimated value of \$4.72 per lb, the open area set-aside would be valued at approximately \$1,944,078; (2) the research TAC set-aside for the Hudson Canyon Access Area of 299,123 lb (135.7 mt), with a value of \$1,411,861 at \$4.72 per pound; (3) the research TAC set-aside for the Closed Area I Access Area of 64,860 lb (29.4 mt), with a value of \$306,139 at \$4.72 per pound; (4) the research TAC set-aside for the Closed Area II Access Area of 153,971 lb (69.8 mt), with a value of \$726,743 at \$4.72 per pound. Thus, for fishing year 2005, the total value of the set-asides available for scallop-related research is approximately \$4,388,821 (44 percent from the open area DAS set-aside, 32 percent from Hudson Canyon Access Area, 7 percent from Closed Area I Access Area and 17 percent from Closed Area II Access Area). Researchers must specify the amount of set-aside (TAC or DAS, as appropriate) sought from each area.

In addition to the sea scallop TAC set-aside, the Joint Framework created a yellowtail flounder TAC research set-aside for the Georges Bank Access Areas (Closed Areas I and II) to account for bycatch taken in the course of approved research and/or compensation trips. This TAC is equal to 0.2% of the overall Georges Bank yellowtail flounder TAC, as established annually by the process described in the NE Multispecies FMP. Vessels conducting approved research projects within these areas may land yellowtail flounder up to the amount specified until the total research TAC set-aside is utilized. Once the set-aside is fully utilized, vessels conducting approved research projects within these areas may not retain or land yellowtail flounder. Researchers need not specify an amount of set-aside yellowtail flounder TAC sought in their proposals.

B. Program Priorities

Projects funded under the sea scallop RSA program should enhance understanding of the scallop resource or contribute to the body of information on which management decisions are made. Subject to experimental fishing permit requirements specified at 50 CFR 600.745, sea scallop research may be conducted in or outside of the Hudson Canyon, Closed Area I, Closed Area II, and the Nantucket Lightship Area, within or outside of the Access Area scallop fishing seasons, and on board fishing or other type of vessels. Sea scallop research conducted with these set-asides also may or may not involve the harvest of scallops.

High priority sea scallop research needs identified by the Council consist of the following (not listed in order of importance):

1. Identification and evaluation of methods to reduce groundfish bycatch.
2. Identification and evaluation of methods to reduce habitat impacts, including but not limited to:

- Broader investigations of variability in dredging efficiency across habitats (substrates, current velocities, etc.) times, areas, and gear designs.
 - Research on habitat effects from scallop fishing and development of practicable methods to minimize or mitigate those impacts.
3. Identification of sources of sea turtle interactions and/or identification of ways to minimize interactions with sea turtles, including but not limited to:
 - Evaluation and analysis of the co-distribution of sea turtles and scallop effort to identify time/area 'hot spots'.
 - Identification of the mechanisms that cause scallop fishing gear to threaten sea turtles during all phases of operation (towing on the bottom, retrieving gear to the surface, and towing at the surface).
 - Development of scallop dredge and trawl operations that would reduce or eliminate the threat of sea turtle capture.
 - Development of appropriate escape gear, gear modifications, or fishing techniques that may be used to reduce or eliminate the threat of sea turtle captures, without unacceptable reduction in scallop retention.
 - Comparison and analysis of turtle capture rates of similar gear in other fisheries such as the Mid-Atlantic summer flounder trawl fishery.
 4. Improved information concerning scallop abundance and evaluation of the distribution, size composition, and density of scallops, including but not limited to:
 - Efforts to develop a cooperative industry based resource survey.
 - High resolution surveys that include distribution, biomass of exploitable size scallops, recruitment, mortality and growth rate information.
 - Research that provides more detailed sea scallop life history information (especially on age and area-specific natural mortality and growth) and to identify stock-recruitment relationships.
 - Intensive sampling on both sides of access boundaries (e.g. Hudson Canyon Area, Nantucket Lightship Area, Closed Area I, Closed Area II) this year and in subsequent years to gauge the short- and long-term effects of fishing on the resource.

Research needs that also will be considered by the Council and NOAA include:

5. Habitat characterization research, including but not limited to:
 - Video and/or photo transects of the bottom within scallop access areas (Hudson Canyon Area, Nantucket Lightship Area, Closed Area I, Closed Area II) and within closed scallop areas (Elephant Trunk Area) and in comparable fished areas that are both subject and not subject to scallop fishing, before and after scallop fishing commences.
 - Development of high resolution sediment mapping of scallop fishing areas in the Gulf of Maine, Georges Bank and Mid-Atlantic regions, using Canadian sea scallop industry mapping effort as an example process.
 - Identification of nursery and over-wintering habitats for species that are vulnerable to habitat alteration by scallop fishing.
 - Other research that relates to habitats affected by scallop fishing, including but not limited to long-term or chronic effects of scallop fishing on marine resource productivity, other ecosystem effects, habitat recovery potential, fine-scale fishing effort in relation to fine-scale habitat distribution.
6. Scallop and area rotation management research, including but not limited to:

- Evaluation of ways to control predation on scallops.
- Research to actively manage spat collection and seeding of sea scallops.
- Social and economic impacts and consequences of closing areas to enhance productivity and improve yield of sea scallops and other species.
- Estimation of factors affecting fishing power for each limited access vessel.
- Demonstration projects to identify ways to reduce discard mortality or increase efficiency without increasing fishing power (e.g., decreasing processing time with sorters) and improve safety.
- Research to identify scallop habitat and ecological relationships that affect reproduction, recruitment mortality and growth, including those enhanced/impeded by area closures;
- Quantification of fishing costs related to fishing for sea scallops in specific areas (e.g., fishing gear modification, steaming time, and opportunity cost).
- Research on scallop biology and scallop fishery social science, including identification of potential management measures to improve benefits to the fishery and to the nation.

C. Statutory Authority

Issuing grants is consistent with sections 303(b)(11), 402(e), and 404(c) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, 16 U.S.C. 1853(b)(11), 16 U.S.C. 1881a(e), and 16 U.S.C. 1881(c), respectively.

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

No Federal funds are provided for research under this notification, but rather the opportunity to fish with the catch sold to generate income. The Federal Government's contribution to the project will be a Letter of Authorization (LOA) that will provide special fishing privileges in response to sea scallop research applications selected to participate in this program. In the past, 2-5 awards have been issued. During the 2004 fishing year, the income generated ranged from \$64,140 to \$200,460, with an average of \$131,990.

B. Project/Award Period

The research project period may encompass all or part of the 2005 fishing year, beginning March 1, 2005 and ending February 28, 2006. Any portion of the 2005 fishing year TAC and DAS awarded to compensate for research costs and participation must be harvested (TAC) or used (DAS) by February 28, 2006. Applications to fund research started on or after the project period, but before final approval of the project for TAC and/or DAS set-aside awards, are eligible for consideration. However, if the project is not approved, any research or expenditures related to this project will be the sole responsibility of the researcher without any compensation from the set-aside funds.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Grants will be issued.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

1. Eligible applicants are institutions of higher education, hospitals, other nonprofits, commercial organizations, individuals, State, local and Indian tribal governments. Federal agencies or institutions are not eligible to receive Federal Assistance under this notice. Also, a person is not eligible to submit an application under this program if he/she is an employee of any Federal agency. Fishery Management Council members who are not Federal employees may submit an application.

2. DOC/NOAA supports cultural and gender diversity in our programs and encourages women and minority individuals and groups to submit applications. In addition, DOC/NOAA is strongly committed to broadening the participation of historically black colleges and universities, Hispanic serving institutions, tribal colleges and universities, and institutions that work in under-served areas. DOC/NOAA encourages proposals involving any of the above institutions.

DOC/NOAA encourages applications from members of the fishing community, and applications that involve fishing community cooperation and participation.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

None required.

C. Other

Evaluations of the impacts of sea scallop research that involve exemptions to the current fishing regulations, other than those stated in the FMP, will be made by NMFS. Vessels conducting certain types of sea scallop research requiring relief from fishery regulations may be required to obtain an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP). To apply for an EFP, interested parties must submit an application to NMFS at least 60 days before the requested start date of the proposed research to allow for additional review and analysis. Additional time could be necessary for NMFS to make determinations regarding requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other applicable laws.

If any part of the proposed research activities occur in state waters, successful applicants, as a condition of project approval, will be required to provide NMFS with a copy of written documentation to demonstrate that the applicant has contacted the concerned state fishery management agency or agencies for any required state authorization. Contact information for state fishery management agencies is available from NMFS.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Application information is available at www.Grants.gov APPLY. Electronic copies of the Standard Forms for submission of research proposals may be found on the Internet in a PDF (Portable Document Format) version at <http://www.rdc.noaa.gov/%7Egrants/appkit.html> under the title "Grants Management Division- Application Toolkit". Applicants without internet access can contact Andrew Applegate, New England Fishery Management Council, 50 Water Street, The Tannery, Mill 2, Newburyport, Massachusetts 01950, by phone at (978) 465-0492;

fax (978) 465-3116, or e-mail aapplegate@nefmc.org or Peter Christopher, at NMFS, Northeast Regional Office, One Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930, by phone at (978) 281-9288, by fax at (978) 281-9135, or via e-mail at Peter.Christopher@noaa.gov.

B. Content and Form of Application Submission

Applications must adhere to the provision under “Applications” and the five requirements under “Required Elements” by the deadline of March 3, 2005. Failure to follow these restrictions will result in proposals being returned to the applicant without review.

1. Applications

a. Applications submitted to the 2005 Atlantic Sea Scallop Research Set-Aside (RSA) Program must include a Standard Form 424 (Application for Federal Assistance), including a detailed budget using Standard Form 424A, (Budget Information--Non-Construction Programs), Standard Form 424B (Assurances-Non-Construction Programs), Commerce Department Form CD-511, (Certifications Regarding Debarment, Suspension and Other Responsibility Matters: Drug-Free Workplace Requirements and Lobbying), and if applicable, Standard Form SF-LLL (Disclosure of Lobbying Activities). These forms are available at Grants.gov or at <http://www.ofa.noaa.gov/%7Egrants/appkit.html>. They should be submitted through Grants.gov APPLY. Applicants submitting hard copy must include one signed original and two signed unbound copies of the application (including supporting information).

2. Required Elements

Proposals should be limited to 10 pages, excluding item “e” below. The format may vary, but must include:

- a. A project summary;
- b. A narrative project description to include: (1) project goals and objectives; (2) how investigators foresee research results being used in the management arena to enhance the understanding of the fishery resource or contribute to the body of information on which management decisions are made, i.e., will data gathered be used for purposes of stock assessment and/or provide important information needed by fishery managers to improve management of the studied species? (3) a statement of work (project design and management--who is responsible, expected products, participants other than applicant); (4) Project Investigator(s); and (5) a summary of the existing state of knowledge related to project and contribution and relevance of the proposed work;
- c. A description of all funding sources (including revenues derived from the sale of scallops harvested under the research TAC and/or DAS set-aside) and funding needs. This element of the proposal must include: (1) the amount of scallop TAC and/or DAS set-aside requested; (2) where the research and/or compensation trip(s) is/are to be conducted, and the expected funds to be generated by the sale of those scallops; and (3) the expected percentage of funds to be allocated to the researcher and any involved fishing vessel;
- d. A budget that includes a breakdown of costs (vessel expenses, permit costs, equipment, supplies, overhead, as applicable), and;
- e. Supporting documents (resumes, cooperative research agreements, contracts, etc.).

C. Submission Dates and Times

Applications must be received on or before 5 p.m. EST, March 3, 2005. Applications submitted through Grants.gov APPLY will be accompanied by a date and time receipt indication on them. If an applicant does not have internet access, hard copy proposals will be accepted and date and time stamped when they are received in the program office. Electronic or hard copies received after the deadline will not be considered and hard copy applications will be returned to the sender.

D. Funding Restrictions

The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of October 1, 2001 (66 FR 49917), as amended by the Federal Register notice published on October 30, 2002 (67 FR 66109), are applicable to this solicitation.

The research project period may encompass all or part of the 2005 fishing year, beginning March 1, 2005 and ending February 28, 2006. Any portion of the 2005 fishing year TAC and/or DAS awarded to compensate for research costs and participation must be caught or used for compensation by February 28, 2006. Proposals to fund research started on or after the project period, but before final approval of the project for TAC and/or DAS set-aside awards, are eligible for consideration.

Funds generated from the RSA landings shall be used to cover the cost of the research activities, including vessel costs, and to compensate boats for expenses incurred during the collection of set-aside scallops. For example, these funds could be used to pay for gear modifications, monitoring equipment, additional provisions (e.g., fuel, ice, food for scientists) or the salaries of research personnel.

The Federal Government shall not be liable for any costs incurred in the conduct of the project by the researcher or vessel owner, should the sale of the excess catch not fully reimburse the researcher or vessel owner for their expenses. Any additional funds generated above the cost of the research activities (or excess program income) shall be retained by the vessel owner as compensation for the use of his/her vessel.

E. Other Requirements

1. Applications should be submitted through Grants.gov APPLY. If an applicant does not have internet access, hard copies should be sent to NMFS, Northeast Regional Office, One Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. Mark proposals "Attention--Sea Scallop Research Proposals."

2. NOAA employees (whether full-time, part-time, or intermittent) are not permitted to assist in the preparation of an application, except that staff may provide information on program goals, funding priorities, application procedures, and completion of application forms. Since this is a competitive program, NMFS and NOAA employees will not provide assistance in conceptualizing, developing, or structuring proposals, or write letters of support for an application. However, the Council or NMFS contact person may provide assistance to researchers who are seeking vessels to participate in the collection of set-aside species or directly in research projects. NMFS, in consultation with the Council, may decide to hold a

meeting with the public to discuss general topics concerning past RSA program accomplishments and ways to enhance communications on funding priorities and associated potential study methods. Such meetings will be publicized by NMFS through a Federal Register notice, and through the public mailing list maintained by the Council office.

3. Applications must be submitted to NOAA and must identify the sea scallop research to be conducted and the areas within which the research and/or compensation fishing is to be conducted. Each application must specify the amount of TAC and DAS required to support the research and to compensate for vessel participation. The total amount of scallops requested for the project must be based on a scallop meat value of \$4.72 per pound and an estimated catch rate of 1,847 lb (838 kg) per DAS. Applications must indicate the amount of TAC from the Hudson Canyon Access Area, Closed Area I Access Area, and/or Closed Area II Access Area, and/or the amount of DAS from the open area set-aside required to support research. If an exemption from Federal regulations is proposed, a list of the specific regulations to be exempted and a brief justification for each regulation to be exempted must be included.

Additionally, each application must identify the requirements for the participating vessel(s) that would make an Access Area trip, and/or additional trips outside of DAS to collect the scallop set-aside. The vessel selected by the applicant should be listed in the application, if possible, or specifically identified prior to final approval by NOAA. The application should also include the agreement between the vessel owner and researcher that shows exactly how the research activity is to be paid for, if possible, or such agreement must be provided prior to final approval by NOAA. Applications must specify the manner in which the scallop research revenue will be generated, i.e. by authorizing the vessel to exceed the scallop possession limit when fishing in scallop access areas, by authorizing additional trips into one or more access areas, or by fishing in regular open areas off the DAS clock in an amount that is expected to generate the needed scallop research revenue and compensate the vessel for trip expenses. Applicants may request that the scallop set-aside be collected separately from the sea scallop research trip(s) or other related research trip(s). The separate sea scallop research compensation trip(s) do not necessarily have to be conducted by the same vessel. The Council or NMFS contact person may provide assistance to researchers who are seeking vessels to participate in the collection of set-aside scallops or directly in research projects. The Council or NMFS may publish a list of those vessel owners willing to participate through their respective home webpages.

4. In the event that an application contains information or data that the applicant does not want disclosed prior to award for purposes other than the evaluation of the application, the applicant should mark each page containing such information or data with the words "Privileged, Confidential, Commercial, or Financial Information - Limited Use" at the top of the page to assist NOAA in making disclosure determinations. DOC regulations implementing the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) are found at 15 CFR part 4, "Public Information," which sets forth rules for DOC to make requested materials, information, and records publicly available under FOIA. The contents of applications may be subject to requests for release under the Freedom of Information Act. Based on the information provided by the applicant, the confidentiality of the content of applications will be maintained to the maximum extent permitted by law.

5. Permits and Approvals

a) Vessels conducting certain types of sea scallop research requiring relief from fishery regulations may be required to obtain an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP). In order to assist NMFS in determining whether or not the proposed research would require an EFP, researchers should briefly address the following questions:

- b) What are the species expected to be encountered during research operations? Provide estimated weights of kept and discarded species by area. Include prohibited species and sub-legal sized catch (e.g., 18,000 lb scallops and 100 lb yellowtail flounder landed; and 100 lb of sub-legal yellowtail flounder and 100 lb of barndoor skates discarded from Georges Bank).
- c) Is the research expected to be conducted with any prohibited gear, during any closed season, with additional crew members or researchers onboard, or in any areas closed to scallop fishing? If so, describe (e.g., using an 8-inch mesh dredge twine top, Georges Bank Access Area scallops to be landed during closed season, researcher onboard in addition to 7-man crew, tows to be conducted in Elephant Trunk Closed Area).
- d) Is any interaction with protected or endangered species expected with the conduct of the research operations (e.g., have sea turtles been known to concentrate in areas/times proposed for fishing operations)?
- e) Will any or all compensation fishing take place separately from research operations?

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

The review panel convened by NMFS to evaluate proposals submitted in response to this RFP (see the Review and Selection Process section of this document), will evaluate proposals by assigning scores up to the maximum indicated for each of the following criteria:

1. Importance and/or relevance and applicability of the proposed project: This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, federal, regional, state, or local activities. For the 2005 RSA program, provide a clear definition of the problem, need, issue, or hypothesis to be addressed. The proposal should describe its relevance to RSA program priorities and detail how the data gathered from the research will be used to enhance the understanding of the fishery resource or contribute to the body of information on which management decisions are made. (30 points)
2. Technical/scientific merit: This criterion assesses whether the approach is technically sound and/or innovative, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear project goals and objectives. For the 2005 RSA Program, proposals should provide a clear definition of the approach to be used, including descriptions of field work, theoretical studies, and laboratory analysis to support the proposed research. (15 points)
3. Overall qualifications of the project: This criterion assesses whether the applicant and team members possess the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. For the 2005 RSA Program, proposals should provide adequate justification as to how the project is likely to achieve its stated objectives. Projects should demonstrate support, cooperation and/or collaboration with the fishing industry. (35 points)
4. Project costs: This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time frame. For the 2005 RSA program, cost-effectiveness of the project will be considered. (10 points)

5. Outreach and education: This criterion assesses whether the project involves a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources. For the 2005 RSA Program, proposals should provide identification of anticipated benefits, potential users, likelihood of success, and methods of disseminating results. (10 points)

B. Review and Selection Process

At the request of NOAA, applications may be reviewed and evaluated by the Council before they are submitted to NOAA, or, if not first reviewed by the Council, reviewed by the Review Team convened by NOAA. Both the Council review and the NOAA review are included to allow the Council to retain its responsibility to consider research in fishery management plans and to allow NOAA to conduct the reviews if the overall Council process prohibits their review in a timely manner.

If the Council is requested to review the proposals, the proposals will be reviewed in a public meeting process by representatives of the Council, based on the criteria described in the Evaluation Criteria section of this document. The Council's representatives will then make recommendations to the Council. The Council will consider recommendations of its representatives, the criteria described in the Evaluation Criteria section of this document, and may also consider the program policy factors listed below. The Council will then make its recommendations to the Regional Administrator through a formal vote or by consensus recommendations, as determined appropriate by the Council. Recommendations from the Council will be given to the Regional Administrator in rank order based on average scores of the projects, taking into consideration the numerical scores based on the criteria described in the Evaluation Criteria section of this document, and consideration of program policy factors listed below.

If the Council does not participate in the evaluation of the proposals, NOAA will solicit written technical evaluations from three or more private and/or public sector experts to determine the technical merit of the proposal and to provide a rank score of the project based on the criteria described in the Evaluation Criteria section of this document. Following completion of the technical evaluation, NOAA will convene a Review Team to review and individually critique the scored proposals to enhance NOAA's understanding of the proposals. No consensus recommendations will be made.

The merit review ratings shall provide a rank order to the Selecting Official for final funding recommendations. The Selecting Official shall award in the rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon one or more of the following factors:

- (1) Availability of funds.
- (2) Balance/distribution of funds:
 - (a) geographically,
 - (b) by type of institutions,
 - (c) by type of partners,
 - (d) by research areas, and
 - (e) by project types.
- (3) Duplication of other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA or other federal agencies.
- (4) Program priorities and policy factors.
- (5) Applicant's prior award performance.

- (6) Partnerships and/or participation of targeted groups.
- (7) Adequacy of information necessary for NOAA staff to make a NEPA determination and draft necessary documentation before recommendations for funding are made to the Grants Officer.

Key program policy concerns are: (1) the time of year the research activities are to be conducted; (2) the ability of the proposal to meet the experimental fishery requirements discussed under the Other requirements of this notice (Sections III.C. and IV E.5a-e) of this document; and (3) logistical concerns. Therefore, the highest scoring projects may not necessarily be selected for an award. Subsequent approval by the NOAA Grants Officer will allow NMFS, as applicable, to exempt selected vessel(s) from regulations of the Atlantic Sea Scallop FMP. For example, NOAA may authorize selected vessel(s) to exceed scallop possession limits, take additional trips into Access Area(s) or take trips that are exempt from DAS regulations to compensate the vessel for incurred research expenses. All sea scallop research must be conducted in accordance with provisions approved by NOAA and provided in an LOA or EFP issued by NMFS. Unsuccessful applications will be returned to the submitter. Successful applications will be incorporated into the award document.

C. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Review of proposals will occur during the two months following the date given in this announcement that the proposals are due to NMFS. Initiation of approved RSA project activities may begin as soon as the authorizing document, as described in the Award Notices section of the document, is received. The date of March 1, 2005, should be used as the proposed start date on proposals, unless otherwise directed by the Program Officer.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Successful applicants will receive notification that the application has been recommended for selection to the NOAA Grants Management Division. This notification is not an authorization to begin performance on the project. Official notification of selection, signed by the NOAA Grants Officer, is the authorizing document that allows the project to begin. Notifications will be issued to the Authorizing Official and the Principal Investigator of the project. Notification may occur electronically or in writing.

NMFS will notify unsuccessful applicants, in writing, by postal mail. If an application is not selected, NOAA will return the proposal and related documents to the applicant.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Administrative and national policy requirements for all Department of Commerce awards are contained in the Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of December 30, 2004 (69 FR 78389). You may obtain a copy of these by notices by contacting the agency contact(s) under the Council and Agency Contact(s) section of this document, or by going to the website: <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html>. Applicants whose proposed projects may have an environmental impact should furnish sufficient information to assist proposal reviewers in assessing the potential environmental consequences of supporting the project.

C. Reporting

Recipients will be required to submit the following financial and performance (technical) reports. These reports are to be submitted electronically unless the recipient does not have internet access, in which case hard copy submissions will be accepted.

Financial Status Reports (SF-269 and SF-272) are required to be submitted to the Grants Officer semi-annually.

Performance or progress reports are required to be submitted to the NOAA Program Officer semi-annually. These reports will be due no later than 30 days following the end of each 6-month period from the start date of an award. The final report is due 90 days after the award expiration.

The format of the final report may vary, but must contain:

1. A brief summary of the completion report (200-word or less abstract);
2. A description of the issue/problem that was addressed;
3. A detailed description of methods of data collection and analyses;
4. A discussion of results and any relevant conclusions presented in a format that is understandable to a non-technical audience. This should include benefits and/or contributions to management decision-making;
5. A list of entities, firms or organizations that actually performed the work, and a description of how the work was accomplished; and
6. A detailed final accounting of all the fish landed, sold, and the disbursement of program income to include a detailed accounting of all funds used to conduct sea scallop research, including those provided through the research set-aside.
7. Data from research projects must be submitted in electronic format with appropriate documentation to NMFS as requested.

D. Limitation of Liability.

In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation costs if these programs are cancelled because of other agency priorities. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to provide special fishing privileges.

E. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicant projects or proposals which are seeking NOAA federal assistance opportunities, including special fishing privileges. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA website: <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/> including our NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA, http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/NAO216_6_TOC.pdf and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations, http://ceq.eh.doe.gov/nepa/regs/ceq/toc_ceq.htm

Consequently, as part of an applicant's package, and under their description of their program activities, applicants are required to provide detailed information on the activities to be conducted, locations, sites, species and habitat to be affected, possible construction activities, and any environmental concerns that may exist (e.g., the use and disposal of hazardous or toxic chemicals, introduction of non-indigenous species, impacts to endangered and threatened

species, aquaculture projects, and impacts to coral reef systems). In addition to providing specific information that will serve as the basis for any required impact analyses, applicants may also be requested to assist NOAA in drafting of an environmental assessment, if NOAA determines an assessment is required. Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying and implementing feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposal. The failure to do so shall be grounds for the denial of an application.

VII. Council and Agency Contact(s)

Information may be obtained from Andrew Applegate, New England Fishery Management Council, 59 Water Street, Mill 2, Newburyport, MA 01950, phone (978) 465-0492, fax (978) 465-3116, or e-mail aapplegate@nefmc.org or Peter Christopher, Fishery Policy Analyst, NMFS, Northeast Regional Office, One Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930, phone (978) 281-9288, fax (978) 281-9135, email Peter.Christopher@noaa.gov.